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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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What a beautiful week to officially end summer, and start the fall! This has been one great week, weather-wise. And on a personal note, I recently added another year to my age this week. Well, I guess "old age" is a state of mind, because I don't feel as old as the calendar tells me I should!

Speaking of age, I continue to discover just how amazing computer technology and the internet has become over the years. I just wish that Atari had been able to stick around to be a part of it these days. But, that's another story best left to the writers of history! Anyway, for the past few months, I've been discovering a "new" aspect of computers and the internet: internet radio. In the department that I work, we're situated in an area of the hospital that is underground, with the radiology department above us. Being able to listen to FM radio is practically impossible. When I'm in my office, I like to be able to listen to some music every once in awhile; talk radio just bores me to death after about a half hour! I then discovered Media Player by accident, and found web radio. After a colleague and I did a little searching, we discovered a "station" that brought back memories of our college days of the late 60's and early 70's - Radio IO 70's! This station reminds us both of the terrific progressive rock stations of that era. Lots of old favorites from the 60's and early 70's - much of it that rarely makes airplay these days on "normal" radio, but was prevalent in "our day" 30-plus years ago! Every once in awhile, I go home and dust off an album (yes, I still have vinyl albums!) and play something that contained one of the singles that I heard earlier in the day. What terrific memories! Without the advances in today's PCs, this capability would be impossible. Personally, I'm grateful for the opportunity to do some work on my PC and be able to listen to some fantastic music that I grew up listening. Those were the "good ol' days", come back for a second round of enjoyment! If you haven't tried listening to radio on the web, give it a try. There are enough variety of stations out there to please every taste in music!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Okay, so I was a bit hasty when I said that Hurricane Ivan wasn't going to cause a lot of deaths. I knew it as I was writing that last week, but even ONE life lost is too much. The loss of life still doesn't make "preventive measures" against hurricanes like I was mentioning last week. I mean, the idea of using a big fan to blow a storm back out to sea may be laughable, but I'll bet that there are still many out there who would be willing to give it a try.

Of course, since we've got about 6 weeks left until the election, I'm going to hammer at you some more about registering to vote. Here's your chance to have your say about who will lead this country for the next four years. And after the last presidential election, I don't want to hear any bunk about one vote not counting. One of ANYTHING usually doesn't seem important, but add all those ones up and you've got a majority. And if you're lucky, you might even have the electoral votes to back it up.

No, I'm not going to get into the "popular vote vs. electoral college" thing. Our system is set up to work the way it does for a reason. If you don't like it... no, you don't have to leave... you just have to stand up and have your opinion counted when you vote.

Now, you've got, at most, two weeks left to register. Most states are kind of funny about making sure that people who register to vote are really residents and such. The bottom line it... don't wait. Get your non-voting, shifting-the-blame, must-be-someone-else's-fault-'cause-I-didn't-vote-for-them butt to your local town hall and register. You'll need some form of I.D., so be prepared.

While we're on the subject of being prepared, a good friend mentioned to me that, while I was bugging you to vote, I should also tell you to find out all you can and educate yourself so that you can make an informed decision.

That's an excellent recommendation, but where do you go for that kind of info? A liberal-minded newspaper? A conservative-minded talkshow host? Well, that's pretty much up to you. There is certainly no shortage of information out there.

But let's face it... you've probably made up your mind already. Even if you don't realize it yet. Your personal philosophy, combined with the parts of your brain that lead you toward one end of the scale or the other have pretty much predestined you to vote one way or another.

Now in its simplest form, that would mean that nothing would ever change, that one 'side' or the other would always be in the lead, and the other would always be subordinate. But things change. Hell, even change changes. I can remember back about a decade and a half ago when a democratic attorney general won a senate seat from a republican by "running at him from the right". He went on to become Al Gore's running mate in 2000. Almost a hundred years ago, Teddy Roosevelt was THE conservative. He believed in protecting the environment above almost everything else. These days, the conservatives want to loot the environment for a short-term gain while the long term would suffer even by their own estimations.

Like I said, things change. You can either be a part of that change, or sit on the sidelines and complain because you don't know what's going on. Which will it be?

Okay, that's enough of that. Let's take a look at the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Mark Duckworth posts this about a BBS package:

"I'd just like to note that over at http://portal.atari-source.com, there's news of a new Octopus BBS release. For those that don't know, this is the single only Atari BBS package that runs natively on an Atari and uses the Stik internet connection to run an internet available telnet BBS (if you choose) or still functions in it's original form using any port, even MIDI.

I've taken up development and maintenance for Octopus BBS from the original author, Koos Kuil and it's completely free now. I've evaluated other Atari BBS options and I believe that no other package for the Atari is even remotely as flexible as Octopus BBS is. Take into account also that the current author is still around and will add any features you wish and if you have the idea to put up an Atari BBS, this is the way to go!

If you have any questions, just email me, or you can Download the BBS and read about it here:

http://portal.atari-source.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=22&page=1

You may wonder why I would bother maintaining an old BBS package. I think a lot of people are moving back to their roots a bit, hence the sudden influx of new people (or rather a return of old people) back to Atari well after leaving to PC's. I think having internet available BBS's suits that, if it is integrated into normal internet life (usenet, ftp, etc), so much the better. If for nothing else, it's something for my TT to do.

If you're curious, the Octopus BBS is running on pikachu.dynup.net. Under windows or linux, just go to a terminal and type "telnet pikachu.dynup.net" and you got it.

As always, please keep in mind that this is a work in progress. Most things probably won't properly like File transfers, magazines, all files listing, qwk and of course, the message bases have no activity."

Greg Goodwin tells Mark:

"This is really great, thanks! I have a TT that I am tempted to put on the network and use as a BBS. This a idea I've been knocking around for a bit now. [I] Just need to get my daynaport working, and this program, and let 'er fly.

I understand this program is still quite buggy, right?

How many out there have had luck getting the daynaport ethernet adaptor to work out there?"

Mark tells Greg:

"Not really, this was quite a mature program before I got my hands on it. Now with each release it gets more stable. It doesn't really crash anymore, you can tell just by telnetting to it. The only time it goes down is for a version upgrade. And with the scripting and menus you can customize the whole system to your hearts content. And of course if you need any help understanding how to set it up for internet mode (which isn't as well documented but easy nonetheless) you can ask me for help. Buggy or not, this is the only supported BBS package left and I plan to support multi-node telnet operation soon. What we really could use is more or less gszrz for STiK. I have a zmodem program for unix but it's for unix sockets and Octopus uses STiK so no real hope getting them to cooperate without digging deep into gluestik, and even then that's only good for MiNT users. I have more testing to do as far as running Octopus under MagiC, etc but I can say for certain it runs well on Falcon and TT with MiNT. I'm working hard to maintain compatibility with 4 meg ST's, singleTOS and MagiC."

Kenneth Medin asks for help with Highwire and Okami:

"Highwire can't find its modules directory if launched from within Okami by clicking on a html link. If I put a symbolic link to the modules folder in the Okami path everything is OK.

Could this be a config error by me or a bug/anomaly in Highwire/Okami/Magic6?"

Martin Byttebier takes a guess:

"Bug in Magic maybe?I'm using the cfg as found in the package. I just changed the CACHEMEN and the path of CACHEDIR path."

Ronald Hall posts this about several of my all-time favorite Atari Vendors:

"One hears so much of "horror stories" when it comes to service that when something nice does happen, well...I like to give credit where credit is due. Just this week:

Brad Koda of Best Electronics continued his unshakeable support of Atari - I bought a Falcon memory board from him and having a few problems, he offers to send a SIMM guaranteed to work.

Steve Cohen of Wizztronics (the Falcon memory boards maker) offers to check the board and any SIMM I want to send with it, free of charge.

Thomas Binder, of the famed Thing desktop, after I e-mail him concerning re-registering, calmly informs me that he still has the details from where I registered several *years* ago, and sends the key, at no extra charge. (and there are lots more - these 3 just stood out this week) This is the Atari community that I remember. Greatest bunch of people in the world."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Dragon Quest VIII!
X-Men Legends Ships!
Console Makers Make Push!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Dragon Quest VIII to Be Released in November

Square Enix Co., Ltd., a leading developer and publisher of interactive entertainment software including two of the world's most popular franchises Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest announced that Dragon Quest VIII for the Playstation2, will be released November 27, 2004 in Japan.

The Dragon Quest Series is one of the leading RPGs in Japan. The series was first released in 1986 and has sold 35.89 million units worldwide. Dragon Quest VIII "Sora to Umi to Daiichi to Norowaleshi Himegimi," using cutting-edge graphics and a new game system, will be released for the PS2 as a completely new Dragon Quest, four years after the last Dragon Quest VII. In addition, the company will prepare a playable version for the 2004 Tokyo Game Show which will be held September 24-26, 2004. This will be the premiere of a DQ VIII playable.

The world of Dragon Quest VIII is created with breakthrough 3D graphics. The world, which includes fields, towns and dungeons, will allow players to move around seamlessly. The graphics are of a high-quality animation, and players can feel as if they are walking around inside the world created by Character Designer, Akira Toriyama.

The battle scenes and monsters make users feel as if they were actually facing them. All of the monsters and characters are transformed with 3D graphics. Battle scenes provide a strong presence of characters and monsters due to its stunning visuals. Moreover, both new and familiar monsters have been recreated with uniquely detailed animation popular among fans of Dragon Quest. These characters come alive with a fresh breath of life.

Koichi Sugiyama, the composer of Dragon Quest VIII and all of the music from previous titles in the series, composed an entirely original score. A classic and elegant score, the music is also memorable and will leave people humming the tunes. The impressive score makes the journey much more adventurous and paints each scene with emotion.

X-Men Legends Ships For Playstation 2, Xbox, And GameCube

The mutant battle rages on to North American retail shelves with the release of Activision, Inc.?s X-Men Legends. An epic action-RPG featuring a compelling storyline written by former X-Men comic book writers, the game allows players to pick and customize a team of legendary X-Men from the Marvel Universe to combat evil and protect the fate of mankind from certain doom. Developed by Raven Software, X-Men Legends has already received critical acclaim, earning an "Editors Choice" award from IGN.com. The title is currently available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, Xbox video game system from Microsoft and Nintendo GameCube for a suggested retail price of $49.99 and carries a ’T’ (Teen, Blood, Violence) rating by the ESRB.

"X-Men Legends is the only game that allows players to fully customize and develop their ultimate dream team of 15 of Marvel’s most popular X-Men characters,"? states Kathy Vrabeck, president, Activision Publishing, Inc. "The game’s original storyline is full of plot twists and turns that will captivate players and enlist them in the most immersive X-Men quest ever."

X-Men Legends challenges players to master the attributes of their favorite X-Men characters by creating, customizing and controlling teams of four mutants in real time, as they embark on a quest to stop the extinction of mankind. Throughout the action-filled saga players assume the role of up to 15 popular X-Men characters, each with individual mutant powers and fighting skills, including Wolverine, Gambit, Nightcrawler and Storm. Gamers select specific X-Men characters depending on each mission and unlock new playable mutants and super powers as they battle the Brotherhood of Mutants and other Marvel villains in fully interactive and destructible 3-D environments. Along the way, players lead teams of mutants on a variety of challenging missions set in some of the most popular locations from the X-Men comics, including the X- Mansion, New York City and the infamous Weapon X facility.

Gamers can adventure alone or team up with friends to battle in up to a 4-player co-operative mode for dynamic Super Hero action.

X-Men Legends is powered by Vicarious Visions Alchemy middleware game engine.

Ubisoft Announces Tork: Prehistoric Punk for Xbox

Ubisoft, one of the world’s largest video game publishers, announced Tork: Prehistoric Punk for the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Tork: Prehistoric Punk, a high-spirited, fast-paced action-adventure game, allows gamers to play as Tork, a fearless and determined cave boy hero who has magical powers that allow him to travel through time and transform into

other creatures. Tork: Prehistoric Punk will ship for Xbox in North America in October for a suggested retail price of $19.99.

"Tork: Prehistoric Punk is one of the few high-action yet kid-friendly games available for Microsoft’s Xbox system," said Helene Juguet, Ubisoft’s director of marketing in the United States. With an expected ESRB rating of E for Everyone,’ Tork: Prehistoric Punk will provide great entertainment for kids of all ages.

After seeing his village destroyed and his father kidnapped, Tork embarks on an adventure to save his father before the course of history is changed forever. To do so, the spontaneous, young punk will travel and explore different time periods, including his own Prehistoric Age, the Medieval Age, and finally the futuristic Age of Machines. As the game progresses, Tork will gain special abilities and attack modes, learn new tricks and pick up cool age-specific power-ups. Tork will battle large dinosaurs, hails of spears, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters that Mother Nature throws his way. Other gameplay features include:

* Venture through 13 dynamic levels.
* Challenge beastly bosses with a set of bolas that pack a serious punch.
* Using Tork’s special magical powers, morph into different animal creatures such as a bulldozing yeti, a mighty armor-plated armadillo, or a high-flying squirrel.
* Unique attacks and abilities add variety to the gameplay.
* Easy to pick up and play, but captivating and varied enough to keep a younger audience interested.

Sony to Launch Latest Gran Turismo Software in Dec

Sony Corp. said on Friday it would launch the latest version of its blockbuster racing game software "Gran Turismo" in December in a potentially strong boost for holiday sales of its PlayStation 2 console.

The Gran Turismo series, originally launched in 1997, has sold more than 36 million units worldwide, making it the most popular PlayStation title created in-house by Sony Computer Entertainment, the videogame unit of Sony.

"More than 650 cars from 80 manufacturers will go into the software, topping the series record of 500 cars in GT 2," Sony Computer Entertainment Japan senior vice president Kazunori Yamauchi told a packed auditorium at Tokyo Game Show 2004.

"Gran Turismo 4" will be released on Dec. 3 in Japan and the rest of Asia, and on Dec. 14 in North America. The European launch will take place around the same time.

Prices have yet to be set, and there is no concrete sales target for the latest version, Yamauchi said.

Gamers Get a Look at PlayStation Portable

Gamers got their first chance to lay their hands on Sony Computer Entertainment’s highly-anticipated PlayStation Portable (PSP) at the Tokyo Game Show this week and initial reactions were mostly positive.

People who already own a PlayStation 2 (PS2) say the PSP faithfully translates the larger console’s environment.

"The performance is quite incredible and the buttons are comfortable.... It’s just like the PS2," says Cody Pang, a 30-year-old gamer who traveled to the show from Hong Kong. Pang, who likes to game on large screens, says he feels that the PSP screen is clear and sharp, and faithfully renders "Metal Gear Solid 3 Snake Eater."

Pang, who owns a PS2, says he thinks the PSP device was a little big for his pocket. But in contrast, Fujiko Yamanaka, a 26-year-old gamer from Japan, was impressed by the PSP’s form factor and says it would be a big selling point for Japanese gamers.

"It’s so cute! It’s so cool!" Yamanaka says. "To me it’s almost like my mobile phone, and I feel I can put it in my handbag and carry it around. It’s going to be popular with girls."

Sony has yet to announce the exact launch date of the PSP, but it will be on sale in Japan by the end of 2004 and internationally in the first half of 2005, according to Sony spokesperson, Masami Nakamura. Ahead of this, however, the company has announced just over 100 game titles for the Japanese market.

Even Sony’s gaming rivals were impressed with the PSP, according to a developer for Microsoft’s Xbox games console attending the show who asked not to be identified. "The visual fidelity is there, the control schematics are faithful to the PS2, the frame rate is fast, and the picture crisp, with the frame rate only showing a lag during particularly heavy combat fire," the developer says.

While PSP’s hardware performance received a thumbs up from the floor of the Tokyo Game Show, one hurdle the handheld may face is a perceived lack of original titles, gamers say. For example, while Pang says that he’d be happy if Sony managed to port most of PS2’s extensive list of games onto PSP, some gamers are looking for more.

"What I really wanted to try was to play "Spider Man 2," and it wasn’t there," says Yoshihiro Sakita, who says he is visiting the show for his tenth year in a row. "I want to play games on the train, and I want to play movie titles," he says.

While Sony gears up for its assault on the handheld console market, Nintendo is not showing its Nintendo Double Screen (DS) handheld console at the Tokyo Game Show. That did not stop gamers and developers from expressing positive opinions about the Nintendo device.

The Nintendo DS’s touch screen is arousing particular interest, as is the price. It will sell at about $150, or about half the price of the PSP.

"I have a PS2, but it’s my private secret that I am looking at the DS, and the touch screen looks very, very interesting," says Takafumi Izawa, a 22-year-old gamer. "In terms of performance, the PSP will win. In terms of price, the DS will win," he says.

The Nintendo DS had only two games on display, according to a Tokyo Game

Show list. One is "Eggumonsutah Hero" by Square Enix, and the other is "Project Rub," a provisional title, by Sega. Despite the lack of titles on display at the show, a flood of games is coming, according to developers, who say they are anxious for both Nintendo DS and PSP to succeed.

Hudson Soft is developing its Bomberman series, already announced for PSP, but is facing some issues redeveloping the game for Nintendo DS's dual screen, says Taeko Makanae, a Hudson spokesperson.

Some developers suggest that Nintendo DS and Sony PSP may suit different markets in Japan, with PSP seen as scoring heavily with hardcore gamers who have a little more money to spend and who expect higher performance. The Nintendo DS may be more popular with younger players, according to Koji Suga, chief of Square Enix's sales and marketing division.

"The DS will make a big success, we think, because Nintendo understands what children like, and they have Mario and Zelda and Pokemon," he says. Square Enix did not have its "Eggumonsutah Hero" game on display.

Sega will put its "Project Rub" game for the Nintendo DS on sale in Japan in December, says Takeshi Shimizu, Nintendo DS marketing manager. Beyond this, the company is planning a big release of games for the console, but it cannot say when, he says.

"The DS has a different screen size and spec than the PSP, but the dual screen also opens up new possibilities for games developers, so we are very positive about developing games for both consoles, for the whole market, from kids to adults," Shimizu says.

Against this, Sony's key to success after launch will be to come up with original games titles and content that will narrow any perception amongst gamers that the PSP might be too expensive, according to the XBox developer.

"The biggest challenges are going to be the retail price of $300 and how fast and how good Sony can move away from porting games from the PlayStation 2," Shimizu says.

The Tokyo Game Show runs September 24 to September 26 at the Nippon Convention Center in Chiba, Japan.

Nintendo, Sony Make Pushes Before Holidays

Nintendo Co. and Sony Corp. made separate product announcements Tuesday that the video game giants hope will attract more customers ahead of the highly competitive holiday shopping season.

Nintendo said its handheld device, called Nintendo DS, will arrive in North American stores for $149.99 on Nov. 21, 10 days before the product is launched in Japan.

Rival Sony, meanwhile, announced a much slimmer, reworked PlayStation 2 designed to cut manufacturing costs amid fierce competition in the console market, which includes Nintendo's own GameCube and the Xbox from Microsoft Corp.

The DS and PS2 aren't competing against each other, but analyst PJ McNealy

with American Technology Research said the timing of the announcements was important for both companies. December alone, McNealy said, typically accounts for about half of the industry's annual revenue, which now tops $10 billion annually.

Nintendo officials said they decided to release the DS in North America before Japan - a first for the Tokyo-based company - because it fit better with holiday shopping patterns. Nov. 21 falls on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, which typically kicks off the Christmas shopping rush in the United States.

Building on the success of Nintendo's top-selling Game Boy Advance SP handheld, the silver and black DS has a flip-screen and is about the size of a paperback.

It adds two 3-inch color liquid-crystal displays so players can see the action and an overhead map at the same time, for example.

The DS will ship with "PictoChat," a program that lets players write messages and draw pictures on the touch screen with a stylus, then send the info wirelessly to nearby DS users.

No specific games have been announced, but more than 100 companies plan to make games, officials said.

McNealy, the analyst, said the November release gives Nintendo an edge over Sony in the battle of next-generation handhelds.

Sony's PlayStation Portable, nicknamed PSP, won't arrive in the U.S. until sometime next year. Pricing and other details haven't been announced.

Earlier this month, Nintendo slashed the price on the SP model but said the move was unrelated to the DS, which the company is aiming at older, more sophisticated gamers.

Sony said its reworked PS2 weighs half of the current model and will go on sale worldwide in November.

It includes the functions from the old model, including DVD movie playback, and adds a built-in Ethernet port and a modem jack for online gaming. The older model required a $40 adapter to play online.

However, a PS2 price cut was not included in the announcement. Sony and Microsoft both cut prices on their consoles by $30 to $149 in the spring. The GameCube goes for $99.

Sony has sold about 74 million PS2s worldwide, including 40 million in United States and nearly 21 million in Japan, officials said. The PS2 leads the global video game market with 80 percent of the market in Japan and Europe, and about 47 percent in the United States, according to Sony.

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AOL Moves Beyond Passwords for Log-Ons

Passwords alone won't be enough to get onto America Online under a new, optional log-on service that makes AOL the first major U.S. online business to offer customers a second layer of security.

The so-called two-factor authentication scheme, being unveiled Tuesday, will cost $1.95 a month in addition to a one-time $9.95 fee. It is initially targeted at small businesses, victims of identity theft and individuals who pay a lot of bills and conduct other financial transactions through their AOL accounts.

Subscribers get a matchbook-size device from RSA Security Inc. displaying a six-digit code that changes every minute. The code is necessary to log on, so a scammer who guesses or steals a password cannot access the account without the device in hand.

Two-factor authentication - whether through the RSA device, biometrics or cards printed with rotating lists of passwords - is common in Scandinavia, Brazil, Singapore and selected countries. In the United States, its use is largely limited to employees accessing office networks remotely, or people with high-value financial portfolios.

AOL spokesman Andrew Weinstein said the time was ripe to offer it as subscribers move more of their sensitive personal, business and financial information online.

The offering also comes as scammers increasingly find ways to trick subscribers into giving their passwords by sending e-mail disguised as legitimate information requests.

And with so many sites now requiring passwords, many Internet users have become careless: They create easy-to-remember passwords that tend to be easy to guess - or they write them down on sticky notes and post them at their computers.

By requiring the second, rotating password, "you don't have to remember complicated passwords to still have good security," said Scott Schnell, a senior vice president at RSA Security.

The second password will be required for checking e-mail and accessing services tied to the AOL account, including calendars, stock portfolios and AOL's Bill Pay.

It won't protect services offered by third parties on the open Internet, outside AOL's walled gardens, except in cases where their statements and other sensitive information are sent to the AOL e-mail account. Nor is the second password needed to use AOL Instant Messenger.

Gartner analyst Avivah Litan believes a "very narrow set of consumers" - perhaps 5 percent to 15 percent of AOL's 30 million subscribers - would sign up, but "you have to start somewhere."

She said AOL's offering likely would prompt other Internet service providers and banks to consider such systems more seriously, though the prevailing belief these days is that customers will find them difficult to

use.

Just this summer, HSBC Bank USA began requiring a second password to access its bill-payment services.

That password is entered using an on-screen keypad to thwart snoops who secretly install software that records keystrokes as they are typed on a regular keyboard.

Unlike AOL’s service, though, neither password automatically changes, nor is there a charge.

House Could Vote on Spyware Bill Next Week

The U.S. House of Representatives will vote as soon as next week on a measure to crack down on deceptive "spyware" that hides in users’ computers and secretly monitors their activities, key lawmakers said on Wednesday.

House leaders will combine two spyware bills and bring them to the House floor for a yes-or-no vote, said Rep. Joe Barton (news, bio, voting record), the Texas Republican who chairs the Energy and Commerce Committee.

The bill is expected to pass by a wide margin thanks to the backing of high-tech companies like Yahoo Inc. and Dell Inc., he said.

"I think that’ll help us to get close to 435 votes when this bill comes up on the floor," Barton said on a conference call.

Spyware can sap computing power, crash machines and bury users under a blizzard of unwanted ads. It can capture passwords, credit-card numbers and other sensitive data.

The bill approved by Barton’s committee would require software makers to notify people before loading new programs on their machines that can collect information about them. Violators could face millions of dollars in fines.

It will be combined with another bill, passed by the Judiciary Committee, that would establish criminal penalties for those who use spyware to commit identity theft or other crimes.

The two bills will be combined in the Rules Committee, then taken up for a vote under a procedure that does not allow opponents to suggest changes, Barton said. It will require a two-thirds majority for passage.

In the Senate, the Commerce Committee approved a similar bill on Wednesday.

A Barton aide said there were few substantial differences between the two bills.

FDIC Warns About E-Mail ’Phishing’ Scam

The FDIC on Friday issued an alert about an increasingly common e-mail scam designed to steal personal information and money from millions of unwary

consumers.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. (FDIC), perhaps best known as an insurer of bank deposits, issued its warning about so-called "phishing" eight months after criminals began misappropriating its name and reputation to perpetrate e-mail fraud.

Phishing lures innocent people to bogus Web sites that look like those of well-known or reputable government agencies, banks, credit card companies and retailers, and deceives them into divulging personal data.

The term is derived from the act of computer thieves who "fish" for private data.

The Anti-Phishing Working Group, which monitors Internet scams, said up to 5 percent of recipients of the scam e-mails respond, often suffering identity theft or financial loss.

The group identified 1,974 distinct phishing attacks in July, up about 1,700 percent from 116 in December.

Institutions that scammers target include Citibank, U.S. Bank, eBay and PayPal, Capital One, SunTrust and Wells Fargo. Two-thirds of July’s attacks targeted Citibank and U.S. Bank, the anti-phishing group said.

In a typical scam, the fake e-mail gives you a reason to verify or resubmit personal or confidential information, such as to confirm a recent transaction, or to help safeguard your account from fraud.

The message then provides a link to what appears to be a real Web site of the issuing entity, but which in fact is operated by the scammer.

You might then be asked to provide Social Security or account numbers, passwords, or information commonly needed to access accounts, such as your mother’s maiden name. Armed with this information, scammers can rip you off.

Many fake e-mails carry return addresses at sites such as Yahoo.com, or contain typographical or grammatical errors - two-thirds of scammers come from such countries as South Korea, China and Russia, the anti-phishing group said. E-mails might even appear to come from entities you don’t do business with.

One recent fake e-mail seeming to come from Citibank urges you to restore full access to your accounts following a tampering by an "unauthorized third party." Another urges you to provide up-to-date information because your "Account Has been frozen!" (The "h" in "Has" is capitalized.)

The FDIC said if anyone suspects an e-mail or Web site is fake, they should tell the real entity, using contact information you know is reliable. It said people may also contact the Internet Crime Complaint Center, a partnership between the FBI and National White Collar Crime Center, at http://www.ifccfbi.gov.

If anyone believes they are a victim of identity theft or see unauthorized account or credit card activity, the FDIC said, they should contact their financial institution and, if necessary, close existing accounts and open new ones. People may also call the three major credit bureaus - Equifax at 1-800-525-6285, Experian at 1-888-397-3742, and TransUnion at 1-800-680-7289 - to request a fraud alert be placed on their credit report.

The FDIC alert appears at http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/alerts/index.html. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission also maintains a Web site on identity theft at http://www.consumer.gov/idtheft.

Ireland Cracks Down on Internet Scams

Ireland is taking "extraordinary" measures to protect Internet users from rogue auto-dialer programs that hijack their modems and run up long-distance phone charges, the country's telecom regulator says. Direct dialing to 13 countries - most of which are South Pacific islands - will be suspended.

The measure, announced by Ireland's Commission for Communications Regulation, came in response to hundreds of consumer complaints about the scams. ComReg acknowledges that its move is extreme but says that previous efforts to raise awareness of the problem failed to significantly diminish complaints.

The auto-dialer programs change Internet users' dial-up settings to call an international number without their knowledge. Users are often unaware that they have been targeted until they receive exorbitant phone bills at the end of the month. Broadband users, who have fixed numbers, are not affected.

According to the RegCom spokesperson, one business in Ireland complained of receiving a phone bill for more than $22,000 due to the scam, while some home users unwittingly racked up phone bills as high as $2400.

RegCom's crackdown follows an increase in reports by consumers worldwide about the rising number of Internet scams, putting the onus on regulators to relieve the problem, the spokesperson for RegCom says.

Numerous complaints about auto-dialers have also been received in the United Kingdom, but so far it has not moved to block direct dialing. In July, however, the United Kingdom's premium-rate telephone services regulator, ICSTIS, began requiring companies that wanted to run Internet dialer services to apply for permission first. Furthermore, the United Kingdom's telecom regulator, Ofcom, decided in August to look into strengthening ICSTIS' powers so it could further tackle these types of Internet scams.

A spokesperson for Ofcom says that authorities are well aware of the dialer scam and that many U.K. consumers have been affected. Regulators fear that if they do not take action, confidence in premium-rate services will be damaged, he says. It remains to be seen whether the United Kingdom and other countries will adopt the measures of Ireland's regulators.

RegCom gave telecommunications operators until October 4 to suspend direct dial to 13 countries where many of the auto-dialer calls were routed. The countries being blocked include Norfork Island, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, and Comoros, as well as Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean that has no indigenous inhabitants, only a joint U.K.-U.S. military base.

The South Pacific island destinations may have been selected because they are some of the most expensive to call from Europe.

RegCom will keep the block in place for six months, after which it will be reviewed. All direct-dial calls will initially be blocked, although the regulator is also compiling a "white list" of legitimate numbers that consumers have requested to call.

The regulator is also working with government representatives from the blocked countries, such as the Irish ambassador for the Cook Islands, to compile the list of legitimate numbers.

Microsoft Sues Web Hoster, Others Over Spam

Microsoft Corp. filed nine new lawsuits against spammers who send unsolicited e-mail, including an e-mail marketing Web hosting company, the world’s largest software maker said on Thursday

With the latest batch of lawsuits, Redmond, Washington-based Microsoft said it is involved in more than 100 legal cases against spammers, including more than 70 lawsuits filed in the United States.

Microsoft has launched a barrage of lawsuits against spammers over the past year in an attempt to curb the spread of unsolicited e-mail pitching everything from get-rich-quick schemes and herbal remedies to penis enlargements.

Microsoft said it filed a lawsuit last week in Washington State’s King County Superior Court against Web hosting company National Online Sales and its owner Levon Gillespie, as well as those who used his services, for offering "bulletproof" services for those seeking to send marketing email.

Gillespie was not immediately available for comment and e-mails sent to his company’s site were not immediately answered.

Aaron Kornblum, an attorney for Microsoft, said the Web hosting company, which offers space on computers for serving Web pages and sending e-mail, based its operations in China so the sites would not be shut down.

"This is the first action against a Web host catering to spammers," Kornblum said, "they’re providing a safe place for spammers to drive customers to."

The other recent lawsuits filed by Microsoft were against spammers sending unsolicited e-mail.

Kornblum said that by taking legal action, Microsoft is "trying to change the economics of spam" by making it costlier for spammers to continue their activities.

Rumors Aside, Browser Is a Logical Step for Google

Google’s next move may be to add a browser offering to its portfolio of Internet products. A New York Post news report suggests that the search-engine giant has added employees to develop such a technology based on the open-source Mozilla browser.

The article, which ran on September 19th, indicated that "Google appears to be planning to launch its own Web browser and other software products to challenge Microsoft." The evidence for the assertion rests on Google's hiring of top talent from Microsoft, Sun and other companies.

Google needs a browser, say the experts. It is the next piece of its evolution. Besides, the company's innovative toolbar has been watered down by the offerings of competitors. It no longer differentiates Google. "The next level is controlling the application," Meta Group analyst Tim Hickernell told NewsFactor.

Certainly, someone at Google has thought about the issue; the company has reserved the URL gbrowser.com.

With Microsoft getting into the search business, it would make sense that Google would want a piece of the Explorer user base. Moreover, Internet-based applications are in right now.

"In the advertising market, vendors are starting to ship 32-bit applications," Hickernell added. "And they ship applications to do searches from within those applications."

Google obviously has the muscle to use the same idea to provide more than just a pop-under ad. He says the Mozilla browser is a great starting point.

But regardless of whether a Google browser turns the consumer world upside down, the enterprise will remain steady-as-she-goes. "In the enterprise market, there's just no way," said Hickernell. Businesses will not stop using Explorer just to gain a slight technology edge.

Many businesses have engaged in too many projects and Web sites, optimized for Explorer, to switch to another browser. Mozilla's security characteristics also are untested. Until it is widely installed, the breakability of the application is largely unknown. "If you're sitting in the CIO's office trying to make the case to drop Explorer in favor of a Google browser, it's futile," Hickernell asserted. "Enterprises just have way too many other concerns than to deal with what kind of browser they're using."

Ask Jeeves Spruces Up for Search-Engine Fight

Search engine Ask Jeeves has rolled out new functionality on its Web site that will help it take aim not only at the big players in this space - Google, Yahoo and AOL - but also at Amazon's up-and-coming A9.com.

Some of this functionality already has been presented to users, such as Ask Jeeve's Local Search, which was introduced earlier this summer. But the company is reintroducing the entire package through a marketing campaign headed by its iconic butler, Jeeves.

"Jeeves is a resilient guy, a survivor," said Scott Garell, executive vice president and general manager of U.S. Sites at Ask Jeeves. "Since he made his debut on Ask Jeeves in 1996, he has weathered the dot-com collapse and the rise of some pretty big players in the search space. While he is holding his own against Google and Yahoo, we thought we should get him into shape before MSN's butterfly climbs into the ring."

The company said Jeeves was last updated in 2000, when Ask Jeeves launched a marketing campaign around its natural language.

Besides its successful brand campaign over the years, Ask Jeeves also has been quietly building its portfolio, both through acquisition and organic growth. This past summer, it acquired all of the assets of Tukaroo, a San Jose, California-based desktop search-technology company.

And earlier this year, the company purchased Interactive Search Holdings in a US$343 million cash-and-stock deal.

The Interactive Search Holdings deal was expected to double Ask Jeeves' market share, the company said, with multiple brands that included My Way, My Search, My Web Search, iWon, Excite and the MaxOnline advertising network.

"Ask Jeeves has been trying for some time to shed its old image as a clunky question/answer search engine in favor of its new technology," Meta Group analyst Tim Hickernell told NewsFactor.

VeriSign Touts Childrens' Online Identity Token

VeriSign Inc. and a children's safety group unveiled a new technology on Thursday that they said would make it easier for children to avoid child predators online.

The i-Stik token, inserted in a computer's USB port, provides verification of a child's age and gender. Chatroom lurkers who can't prove their age will stick out like sore thumbs as more kids adopt the tokens, backers said.

"This doesn't guarantee everything, but at least it cuts the field down," said Montana Republican Sen. Conrad Burns at a Capitol Hill press conference that was attended by several other lawmakers.

The token will be available free to students in a handful of schools this fall. School administrators will provide a list of students, with their ages and genders, and VeriSign will encode that information onto the tokens.

The program will be expanded to thousands of schools across the country starting in the spring of 2005, said Teri Schroeder, president of the children's' online safety group i-Safe America.

The token, made by VeriSign, is also used to verify the identity of people logging on to corporate networks.

New Computer Mice Cutting Edge

If you're still pointing and clicking with the factory-issued mouse that came with your computer - or, heaven forbid, if you're still using your laptop's barbaric touch pad - it's time to upgrade.

A new generation of cordless mice debuts this month, featuring lasers and rechargeable batteries. They even provide a modicum of relief to carpal tunnels and aching fingers.

Eat your hearts out, co-workers.

The sleek new gizmos that now pass for computer mice look more like miniature spaceships or palm-sized remote controls than gray rodents whose roller balls choke on dust - even if they do set you back at least $50.

I tried two new models from Logitech Inc., the Swiss technology giant that has sold more than 500 million mice since 1981. Doug Engelbart, who invented the mouse in 1962, still maintains an office at Logitech’s office park in Fremont, Calif.

My favorite was the $80 MX1000 Laser, billed as the world’s first commercial laser mouse.

It comes with a built-in, rechargeable lithium-ion battery that requires a recharge every three weeks in its docking station. It works with Windows 98 or Macintosh OS X or newer operating systems and requires a USB or PS/2 port.

The MX1000 tracks movements using Agilent Technologies’ short-wavelength laser instead of a typical optical mouse’s light-emitting diode, making the MX1000 roughly 20 times more sensitive to surface details.

The laser beams through a silver ring on mouse’s belly. The light bounces off the surface of your desk (or filing cabinet, or piece of cardboard, or slab of marble) and signals a sensor that captures 5.8 megapixels of detail per second.

That lets you click and point over most flat surfaces, such as glass, tile or lacquer - a boon to graphic artists, Web designers and others in the Bang & Olufsen crowd who disdain plebeian wooden desks.

But you don’t have to be a fashionista to appreciate the 1.7-pound MX1000.

From sticky tabs to manila folders, crumbs and dog hair, so much junk clogs my desk that old-fashioned mice trip more often than track. The MX1000 never missed a point or click, even on a daunting obstacle course of reporter’s notebooks, a cookie sheet and a pile of stamped postcards.

It even performed admirably - though not flawlessly - on the rubberized, curved arm rest of my office chair. It worked up to a distance of about 5 feet.

I also tried the $50 MediaPlay Cordless Mouse, designed for people who listen to music and watch videos on their PCs.

MediaPlay is a wireless mouse that doubles as a remote control to adjust volume, forward and rewind digital media programs up to 10 feet from the base station. The 16.6-ounce mouse works with Windows 98 or newer operating systems on IBM-compatible PCs and requires a USB or PS/2 port.

The slick design includes six backlit media buttons, such as play, pause, forward and back. The software works with media players including Windows Media Player and RealPlayer.

Buying a MediaPlay mouse gets you 10 free downloads from Musicmatch. A

button just beneath the scroll wheel launches Logitech’s MediaLife software, which gives you more free music and video.

MediaPlay comes with a desktop USB stand, two AA batteries and a wireless mini receiver the size of a flip-out car key that plugs into a USB port.

MediaPlay has an easy-to-grip hourglass shape and contoured base so it easily doubles as a remote control. Its rubber ridge felt grippable and firm - better than standard-issue, straightedged remotes.

This mouse won’t spend its life on your desk.

I’ve been a Logitech fan for years, mainly because the company makes gadgets so easy to install and use that I rarely have to read the directions.

My only complaint was that installing the software resulted in a slew of icons - including advertising and marketing for other companies - on my start menu and desktop that took time to uninstall. This complaint isn’t unique to Logitech, but I wish tech companies would be more respectful of my computer’s memory and my low tolerance for third-party ads - particularly applications that launch AOL for Broadband.

I’m also wondering about the laser mouse’s battery life. (My Sonicare toothbrush was great for a year, then spent most of its remaining life in the recharging cradle. It died within three years of purchase, making me wonder whether other rechargeable products will meet the same fate.)

Complaints aside, I really like how the new mice let you toggle between Web pages with only the slightest thumb movement - eliminating unnecessary movement for my soon-to-be-arthritic fingers.

If you spend any amount of time with your computer mouse, the $50 that a new optical mouse costs is a worthwhile investment. And you won’t even have to clear your desktop of crumbs.

Yahoo Survey Reveals ’Web Withdrawal’

Take away their Web access, and most people have a hard time coping, suffering withdrawal symptoms reflected in feelings of being hopelessly out of touch with the world. That is the conclusion drawn from research conducted by Web portal Yahoo and media services firm OMD.

Participants in the Internet Deprivation Study, which examined consumers’ media habits and their emotional connection toward the Internet, revealed that carrying on their normal routine without the Web was more difficult than they expected - and in some cases impossible, because the Internet’s tools and services had become firmly ingrained in their daily lives.

Participants located in Portland, Chicago and Boston found that daily activities - such as booking travel, paying bills, checking sports scores and communicating with friends and family - were significantly impaired when Internet access was removed for two weeks.

Regardless of age, household income or ethnic background, all participants in the ethnographic research study experienced feelings of loss, frustration and disconnectedness when cut off from the online world. Users

described their time offline as "feeling left out of the loop," having to "resist temptation," and missing their "private escape time" during the day.

Nearly half the respondents in a complementary quantitative study indicated they could not go without the Internet for more than two weeks, and the median time respondents said they could go without being online was five days.

Sean Finnegan, director of OMD Digital, told NewsFactor that the study results, indicating "an utter reliance" on the Internet among individuals, will be applied by his company as it advises clients on how to spend their advertising dollars.

"From a corporate standpoint, the advertising industry now has information on the behavior of a fragmented online universe," Finnegan said. "We can put a face on the everyday user and the amount of time being spent online. It’s clear that advertisers should consider the Web as a viable platform in reaching consumers, even though they may have some misgivings."

The participants’ reactions were captured at different stages throughout the two-week study period and supplemented with video and written diaries.

Despite being paid some SP5000 per household, most participants were ready to return the money within five days in exchange for reconnecting to the Internet, said Finnegan. "There was a clear expression of frustration."

The survey findings demonstrate that a larger circle of social networks have developed as a result of Web access. Among the comments offered by participants was, "I haven’t talked to people I usually talk to and have been tempted to go on instant-messenger, because I feel out of the loop," from Kristin S.

"One man in Boston even reported that he was missing spam," said Finnegan.

With Internet access removed, participants reported increased reliance on mobile phones, traditional media such as newspapers, and visits to the bank and travel agency.

"The study indicates that conducting such tasks is much quicker and cheaper online, providing a distinct advantage for consumers," Finnegan said.

At the same time, he noted, individuals without Web access did spend more face-to-face time with friends, family and co-workers, which is not a bad thing.

Microsoft Blogger Tracks 7 Years Of Spam

Microsoft employee Raymond Chen has compiled unique evidence of the explosion of spam: he’s saved every spam message and virus-laden e-mail he’s received at work since 1997.

Not willing to stop there, Chen graphed the spams and viruses to create a cool visual representation of one man’s malicious traffic.

Why save every spam? Good question.

Chen’s answer? "Occasionally, it comes in handy, for example, to add nave

Bayesian spam filter to my custom-written email filter," he wrote in his blog.

Actually, the graph is an interesting view, for it visually demonstrates the explosion of spam in 2002, its continued rage in 2003, and finally, in 2004, a bit of a fall-off as enterprise filters and defenses come into play.

"You can see that in late 2003, the blue dot density [which shows spam received] diminished considerably. That's when mail administrators found a filter whose false-positive rate was low enough to be acceptable," Chen wrote.

For a peek at the graph, head to Chen's blog.

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